

Understanding and Responding to Anxiety



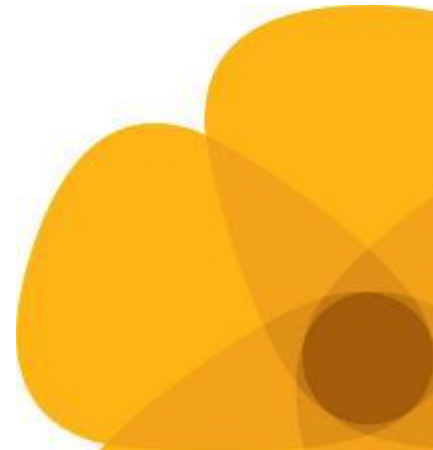
Elissa Whitby

Team Manager
Primary Behaviour Service



House keeping

- Phones on silent please.
- Feel free to ask questions as we go.
- Confidentiality is paramount.
- Beacon House.



Anxiety

Aims of the session:

- To understand what anxiety is.
- To talk through some top tips for responding to anxiety.



How is it going for you?

ARE YOU
WELL?

HOW ARE
YOU DOING?!

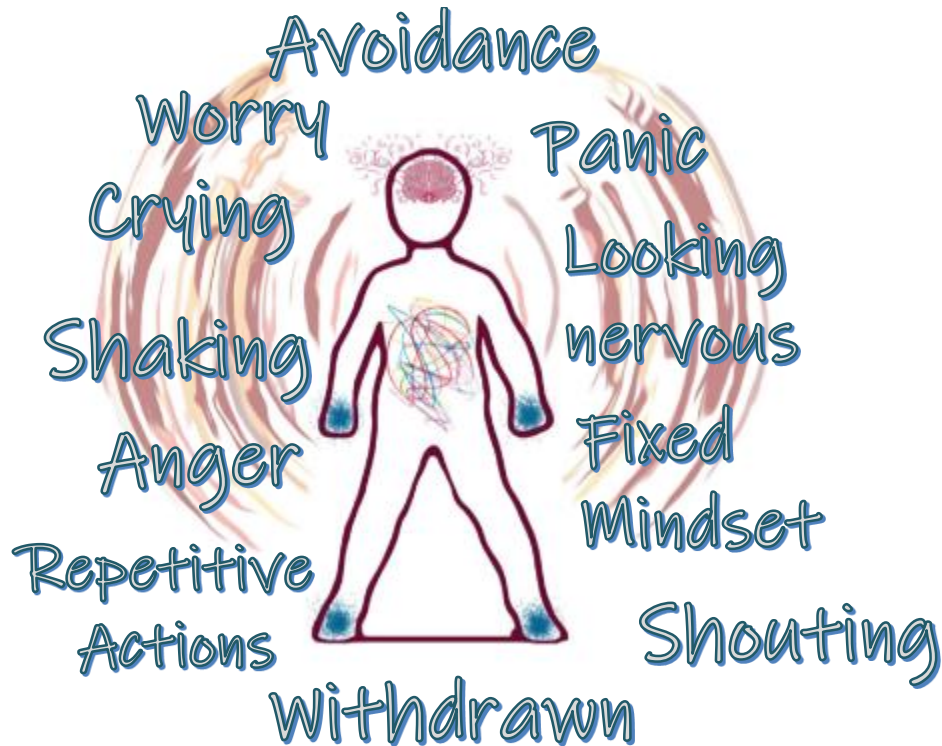
HOW'S
THINGS?

YOU
ALRIGHT?

HOW'S IT
GOING?!



What is anxiety?



- A normal response to something dangerous or stressful...
- When we detect a 'threat', our nervous system releases stress hormones including adrenaline and cortisol.
- These produce physiological changes which help us 'deal with' the imminent danger.

Fight, Flight, and Freeze Responses

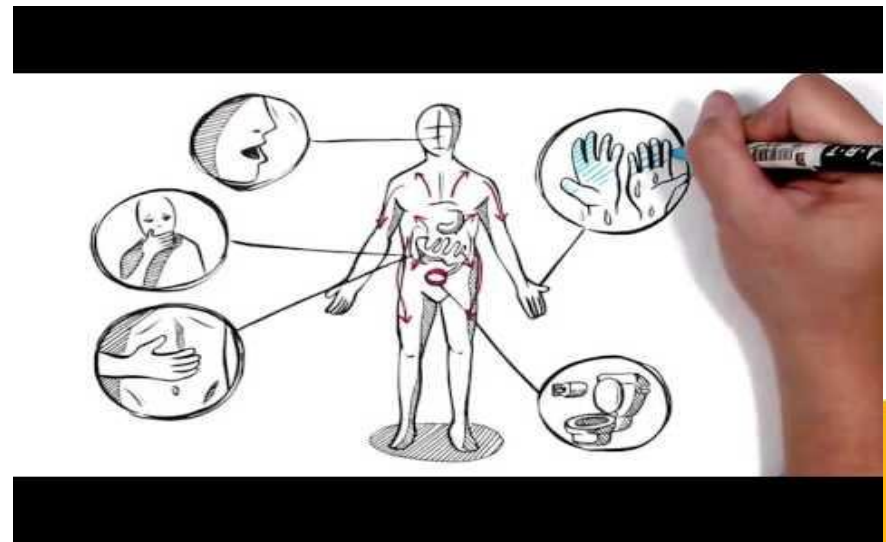
Younger Children

You Tube: Anxiety Canada



Older Children

You Tube: Braive



WHEN WE'RE IN DANGER, OUR BODY GOES INTO FIGHT/FLIGHT MODE TO STAY SAFE. SOMETIMES, OUR BRAINS GET STUCK IN THIS MODE, AND WE PREPARE FOR DANGER EVEN WHEN IT IS NOT THERE. WHEN YOUR BODY IS IN THIS MODE YOU MAY...



NOT BE ABLE TO THINK

You can only think about how to get out of danger or escape, it is really hard to concentrate on anything else

SEE EVERYTHING

Your eyesight will become more focused or sharper so you can see all the 'danger' and stay safe

HAVE A DRY MOUTH

Your mouth gets dry as it is part of your digestive system which shuts down to send energy to your muscles.

GET READY

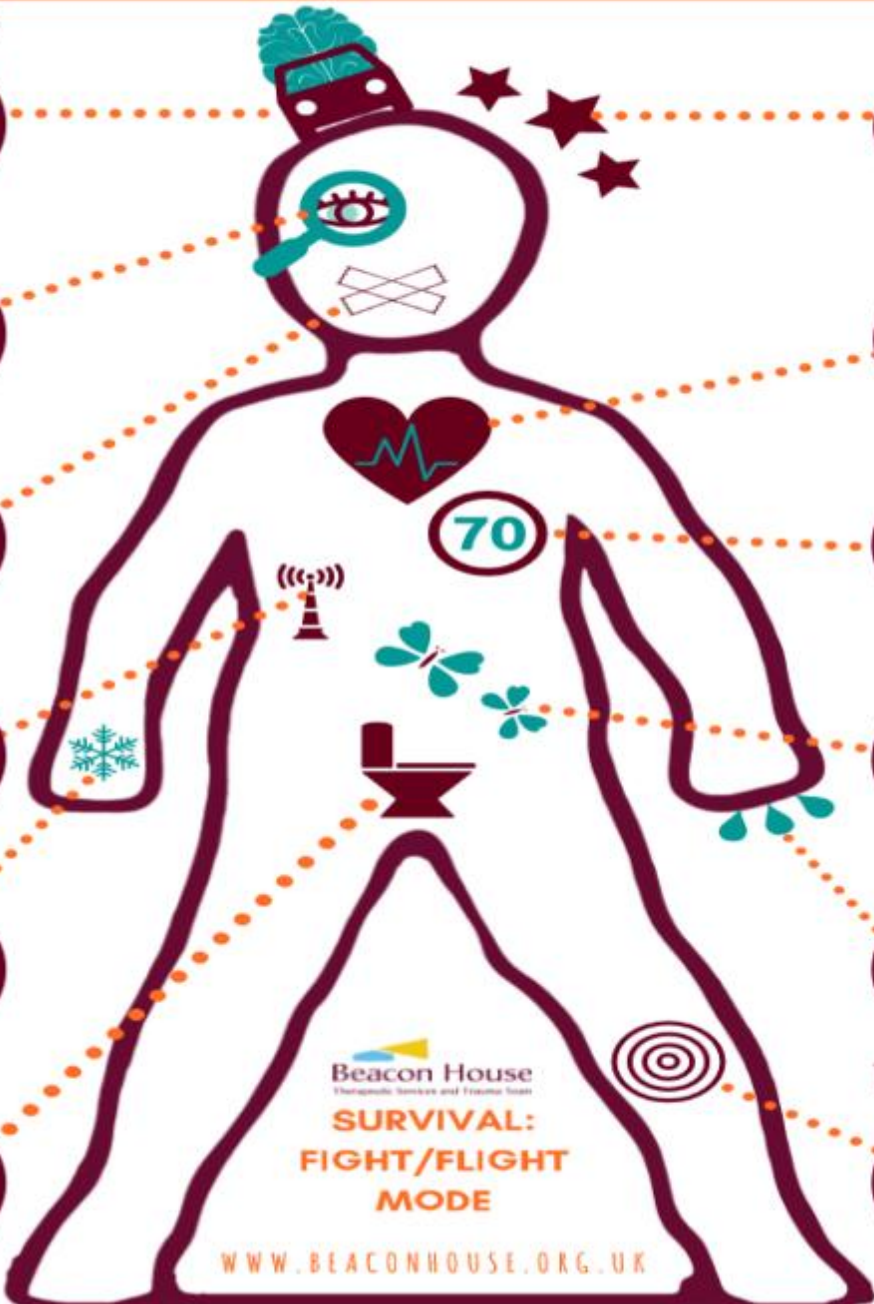
Adrenaline is quickly released from your adrenal glands so your body knows to get ready to protect itself.

FEEL COLD

All the blood in your hands is being sent to your major muscle groups so your hands may get cold.

NEED THE TOILET

You might find you need the toilet, sometimes the muscles that hold your wee in relax when you are in danger



FEEL DIZZY

All the extra oxygen our lungs take in to get us ready to fight or run makes us dizzy if we don't use it.

FEEL YOUR HEART RACE

Blood is pumped into your muscles to make it quicker for you to run or fight, this will make your heart beat faster

BREATHE FASTER

The more oxygen you have the faster you can run away so you'll start breathing faster for a quick escape

HAVE BUTTERFLIES

All the blood in your stomach is rushing to fuel your muscles which can make it feel like butterflies in your tummy

START SWEATING

Your body can protect itself better if it is cool so you will sweat to make your body work faster

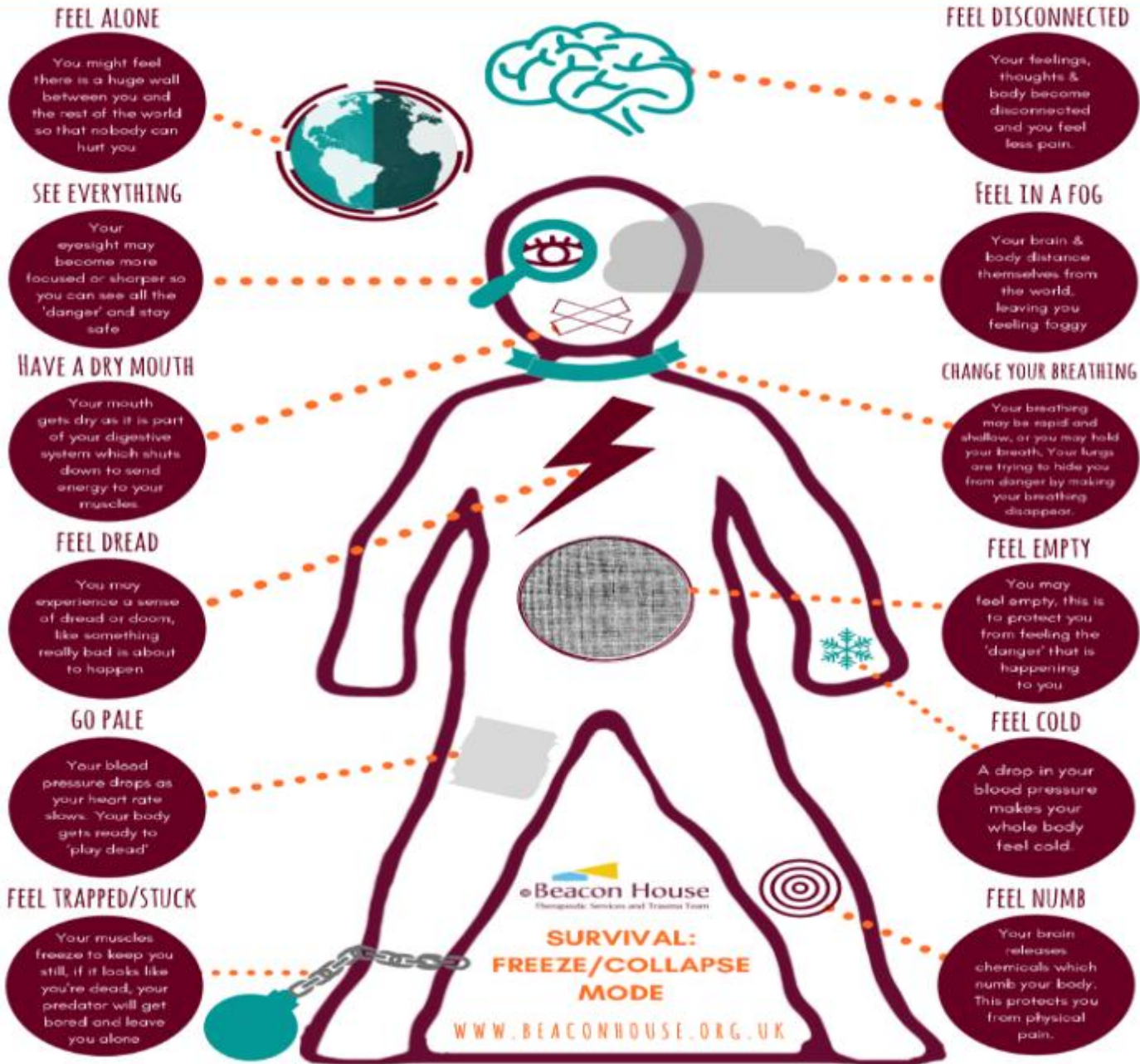
TENSE YOUR MUSCLES

To get ready to run or fight, your muscles will tense - they may even shake if you're still so you're ready to go

Beacon House
Therapeutic Services and Training Team
**SURVIVAL:
FIGHT/FLIGHT
MODE**



WHEN WE ARE IN DANGER AND WE REALISE THAT FIGHTING OR RUNNING AWAY IS NO USE, OUR BODY GOES INTO FREEZE OR COLLAPSE MODE. OUR BODY IS TRYING TO MAKE US 'DISAPPEAR' SO THAT THE DANGER GOES AWAY. OUR BODY ALSO CHANGES SO THAT PAIN HURTS LESS. SOMETIMES OUR BRAINS GET STUCK IN THIS MODE, AND WE GO INTO FREEZE OR COLLAPSE EVEN WHEN DANGER IS NOT THERE. WHEN YOU ARE IN THIS MODE, YOU MAY....



When does anxiety become a problem?



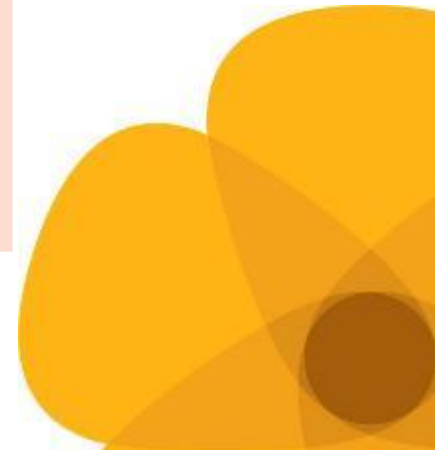
There is a fear or worry about a particular event or multiple areas of life, and it is:

Excessive compared to that experienced by peers (age-inappropriate)

Leads to avoidance of events

Causes significant distress and/or significant interference in daily activities

Persistent, lasting 6 months or more.



How common is anxiety?



Different Types of Anxiety

- An awareness of the specific anxiety or anxiety trigger can help us to know how to support the anxious child or young person.

- Specific Phobias
- Social Phobia or Social Anxiety
- Separation Anxiety
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)
- Panic Disorder
- ARFID

*It is worth being aware that anxiety behaviours are often present in the linked disorders:
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
and
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*

COVID-related triggers:

Adults wearing **masks** in new places e.g. visitors in schools
New separation anxiety due to health worries about family
Uncertainty about different rules in different places or changing rules
Access to news that is concerning or out of context
Hand washing routines becoming obsessive
Anxieties about their own health



The Anxiety Cycle

TRIGGER



Thoughts

"I'm not good enough"
"No-body likes me"



Behaviour

Avoidance, withdrawal,
aggression

Feelings

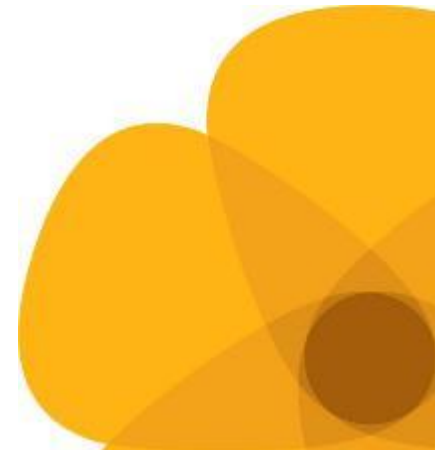
fear, worry, anger

Body

Sweating, faint,
fast heart rate



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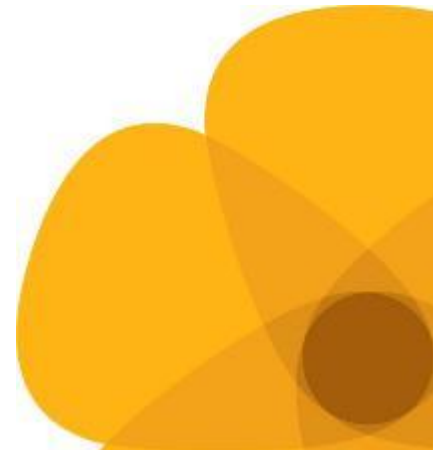
What do children worry about?



What do children commonly worry about?

3-6-years

- Disasters, monsters, imaginary creatures,
- Things under the bed,
- Things outside,
- Unfamiliar noises,
- Shapes of shadows; nightmares can start.
- Food and eating
- Toileting



What do children commonly worry about?

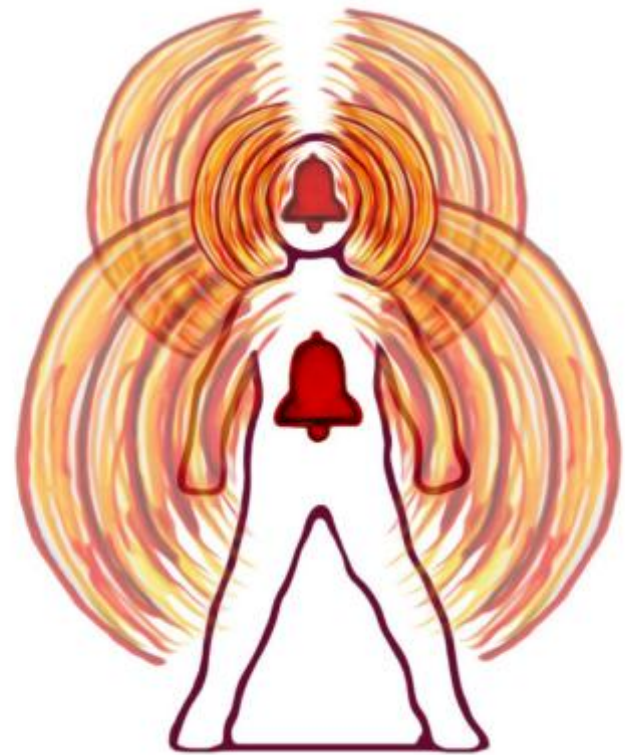
8-12 years

- School performance, especially around tests and being 'picked'
- Parents divorcing or a parent dying
- Crime, 'baddies', burglars
- Peer rejection or being excluded
- Being bullied
- Themes related to what's in the news



What you might see or hear...

Anxiety doesn't always look like worry or fear;
it might be **FIGHT AND FLIGHT AND FREEZE**



8 WAYS A CHILD'S ANXIETY SHOWS UP AS SOMETHING ELSE

1. Anger

The perception of danger, stress or opposition is enough to trigger the fight or flight response leaving your child angry and without a way to communicate why.



2. Difficulty Sleeping

In children, having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep is one of the hallmark characteristics of anxiety.



3. Defiance

Unable to communicate what is really going on, it is easy to interpret the child's defiance as a lack of discipline instead of an attempt to control a situation where they feel anxious and helpless.



Chandeliering is when a seemingly calm person suddenly flies off the handle for no reason. They have pushed hurt and anxiety so deep for so long that a seemingly innocent comment or event suddenly sends them straight through the chandelier.

4. Chandeliering



5. Lack of Focus

Children with anxiety are often so caught up in their own thoughts that they do not pay attention to what is going on around them.

FOCUS

6. Avoidance

Children who are trying to avoid a particular person, place or task often end up experiencing more of whatever it is they are avoiding.



7. Negativity

People with anxiety tend to experience negative thoughts at a much greater intensity than positive ones.

8. Overplanning

Overplanning and defiance go hand in hand in their root cause. Where anxiety can cause some children to try to take back control through defiant behavior, it can cause others to overplan for situations where planning is minimal or unnecessary.

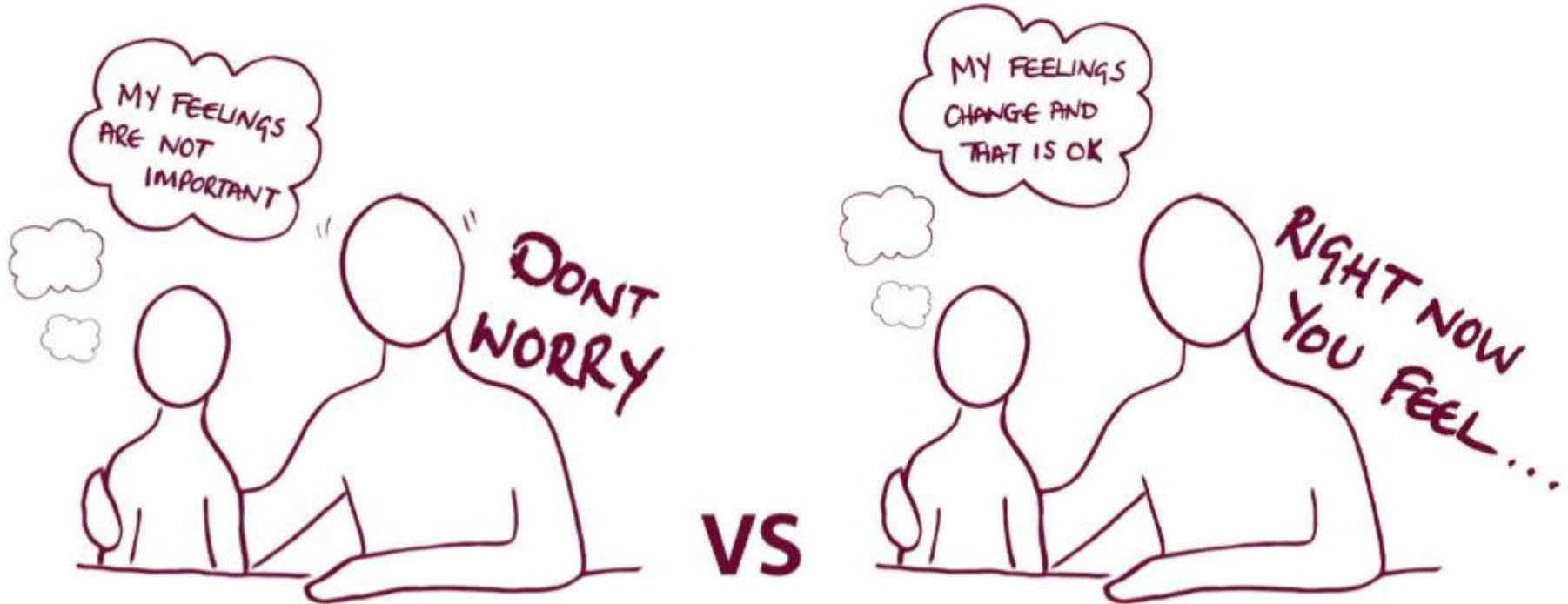


gozen.com



Top Tips





Feelings Come & Go





Priority: Calm the body

- Deep breathing (use eye contact & touch)
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Rhythmic movements (walking, running, rocking, jumping, stomping, tapping, trampolining)
- Pushing/pulling (press ups, tug of war)



EXPLORING WITH YOUR SENSES

If you have a special grounding object, hold it during this activity. It will help charge it up with more calming power!



5 THINGS YOU CAN SEE



4 THINGS YOU CAN FEEL



3 THINGS YOU CAN HEAR



2 THINGS YOU CAN SMELL



1 GOOD THING ABOUT YOU

**Mindfulness
to the 'here
and now'**



Finger Breathing



Alternative breathing techniques:

Mindful Breathing



Just One Breath
BREATHING ACTIVITY

Find a relaxing place, sit comfortably, and set a timer for one minute.

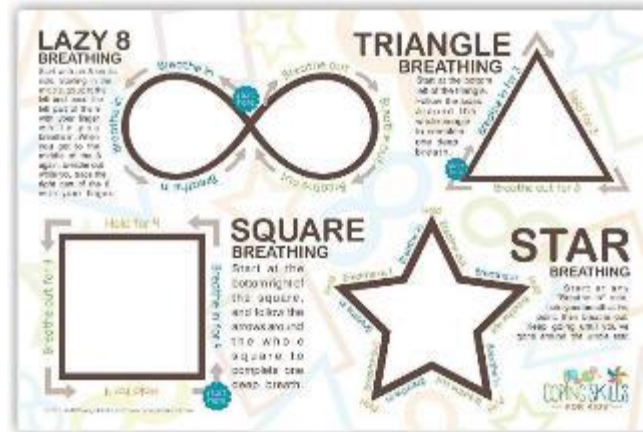
Breathe deeply in and out while paying attention to any sensations you notice or sounds you hear.

Take another slow deep breath, imagine the air moving down into the lungs and back up.

Take one more deep breath and hold for a moment, then release it.

Big Life Journal - biglifejournal.com

Belly Breathing

LAZY 8 BREATHING
Start at the top of the infinity symbol. Breathe in as you go down the left side, breathe out as you go up the right side. Repeat.

TRIANGLE BREATHING
Start at the bottom left of the triangle. Breathe in as you go up the left side, breathe out as you go down the right side. Repeat.

SQUARE BREATHING
Start at the bottom left of the square. Breathe in as you go up the left side, breathe out as you go down the right side. Repeat.

STAR BREATHING
Start at any point on the star. Breathe in as you go up the left side, breathe out as you go down the right side. Repeat.

Shape Breathing

Blowing Bubbles



Pom-Pom Races or Mazes



Blowing Pinwheels



Regulation Activities:

Sensory Activities such as
Orbeez or Kinetic Sand



lifting, pushing, pulling,
jumping or pressure

Yoga such as Cosmic Kids



High Interest activities or
those requiring repeated
actions

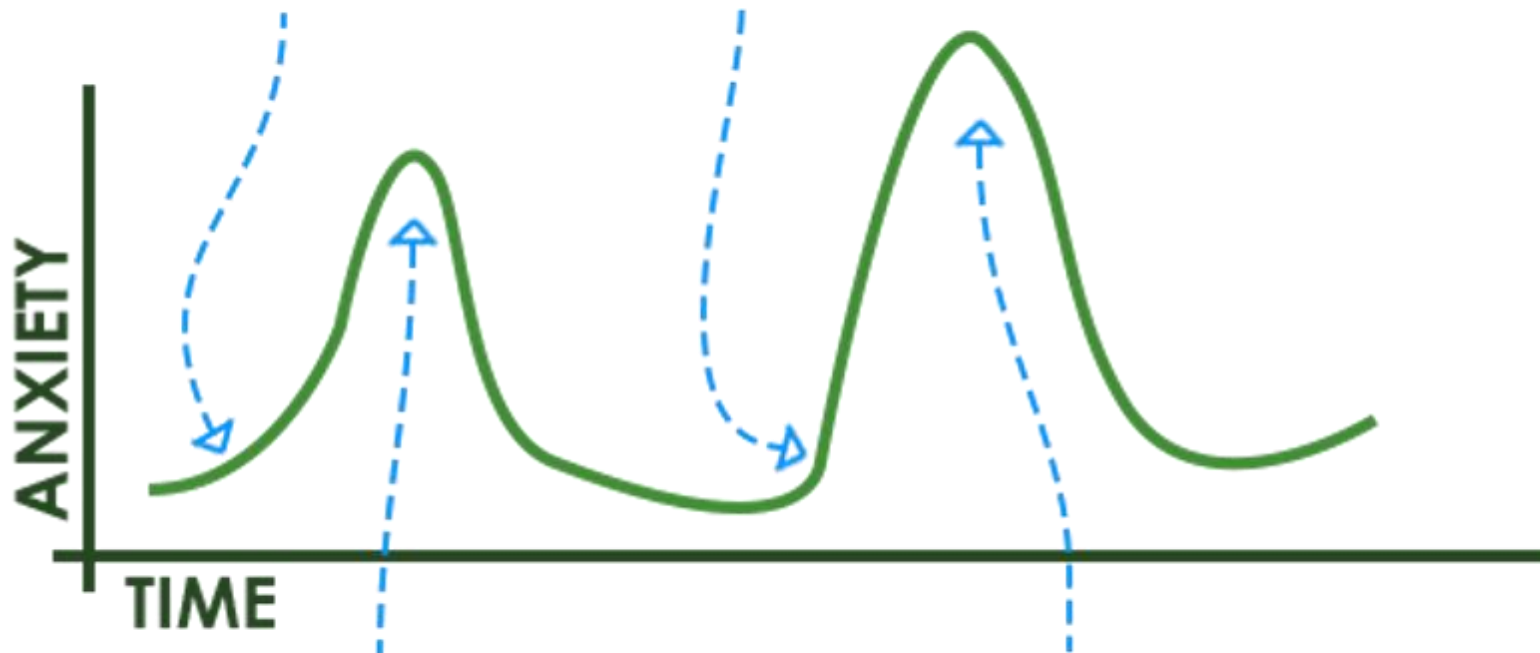


Avoid avoidance

- Avoidance & excessive reassurance grow and maintain stress and anxiety
- The brainstem never learns ‘this is safe, I am okay’
- Acute episodes of stress and anxiety almost always reduce after 45 mins – and when this starts to happen the brain does important learning.
- Reduce the anticipatory anxiety

Avoidance

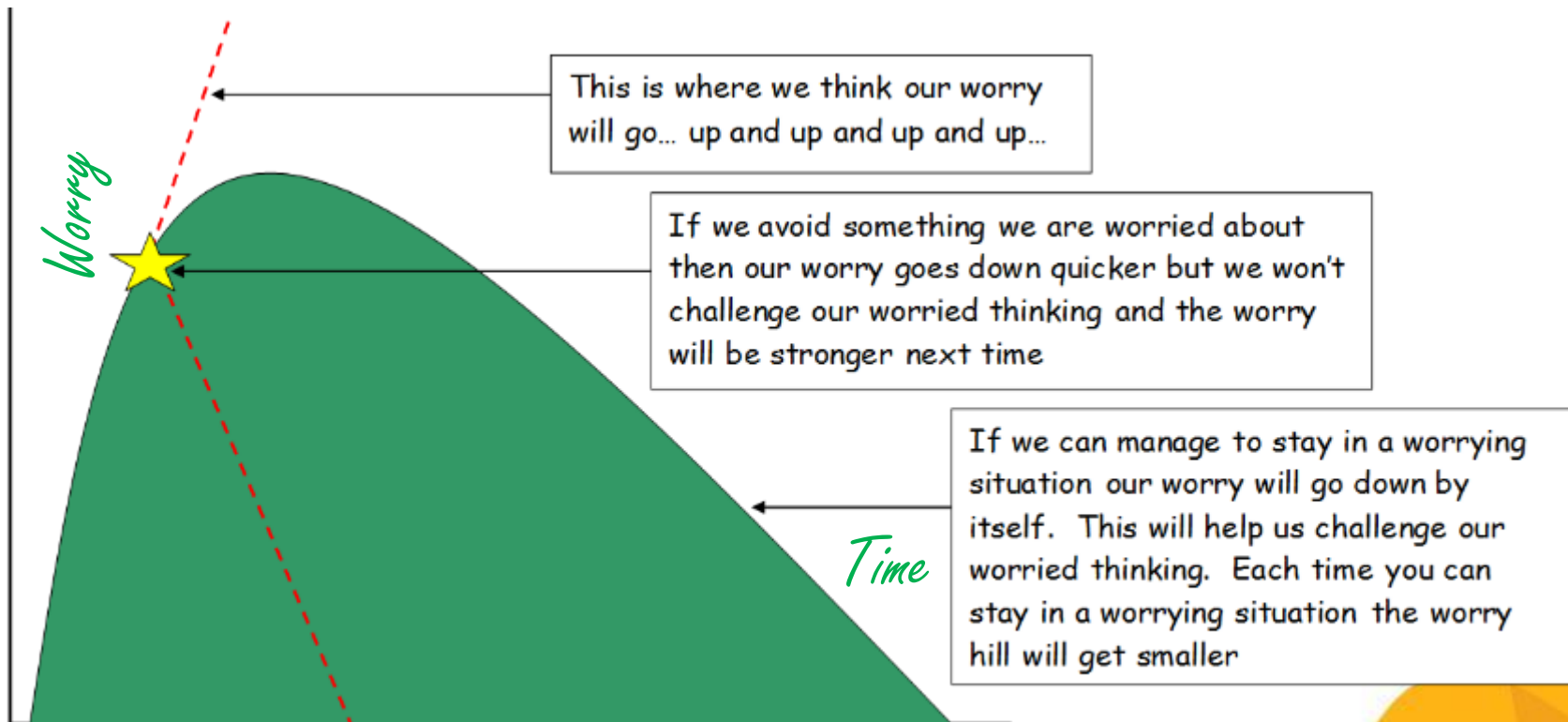
(A person is confronted with an anxiety-producing situation which leads to an uncomfortable sense of worry and agitation.)



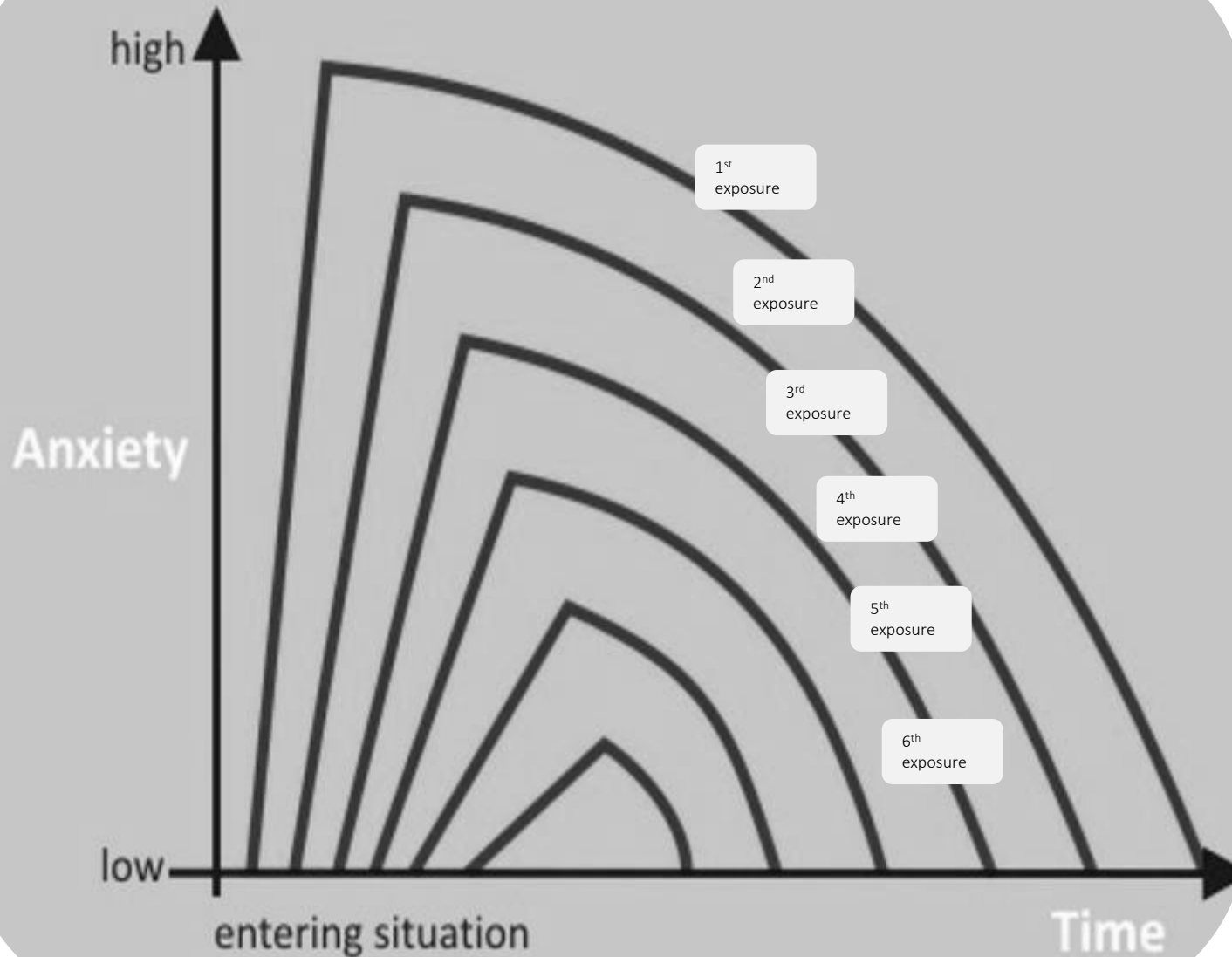
(The anxiety-producing situation is avoided, and the person receives a feeling of relief. However, next time the anxiety will be worse.)



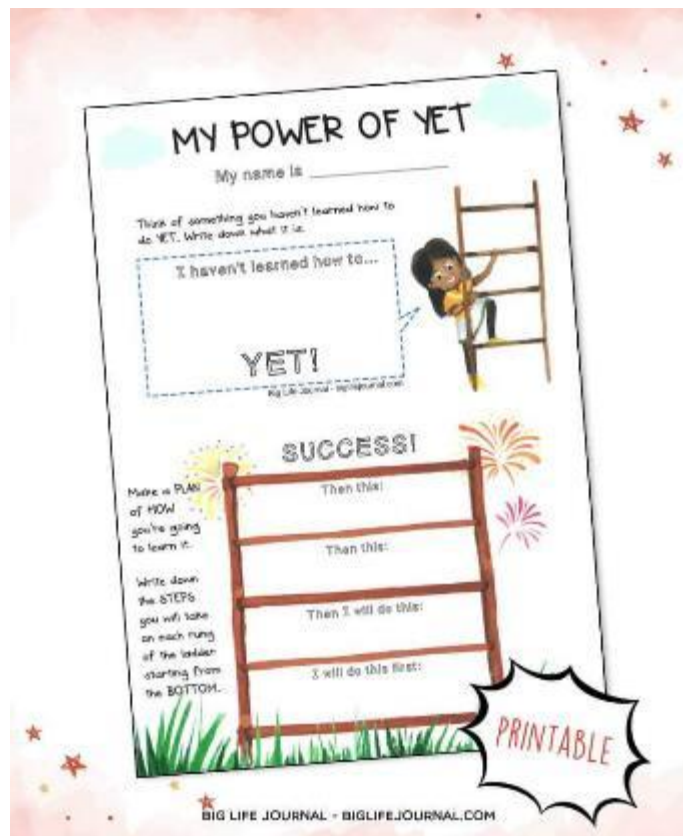
The Worry Hill



Graded Exposure:



Graded exposure examples:



Behavior	Fear rating
Think about a spider.	10
Look at a photo of a spider.	25
Look at a real spider in a closed box.	50
Hold the box with the spider.	60
Let a spider crawl on your desk.	70
Let a spider crawl on your shoe.	80
Let a spider crawl on your pants leg.	90
Let a spider crawl on your sleeve.	95
Let a spider crawl on your bare arm.	100

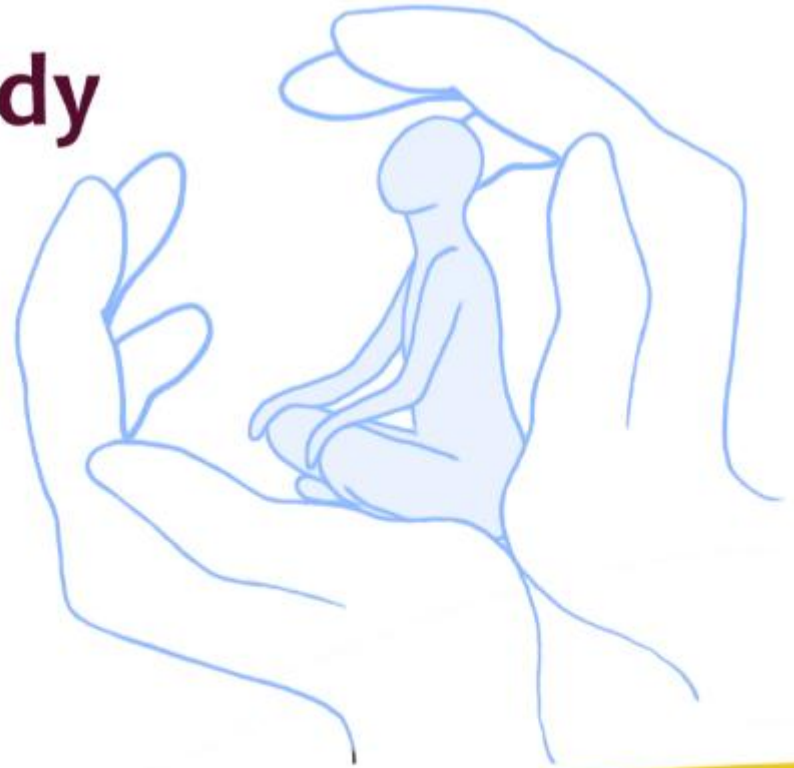




Take care of the body

There are many things that mimic or worsen the physiology of anxiety and should be avoided or reduced

- Caffeine and other stimulants
- Being very tired
- Poor diet (especially vitamin B12 deficiency)
- Spikes in blood sugar
- Inactivity





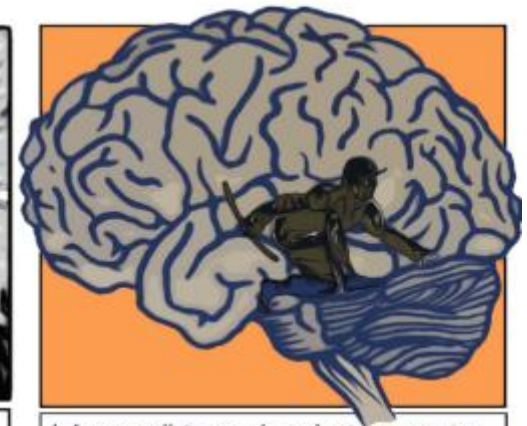
Making Sense



Anxiety is something lots of people feel. About 1 out of every 8 kids at some time in their life.



Part of your brain thinks there is something you need protection from.

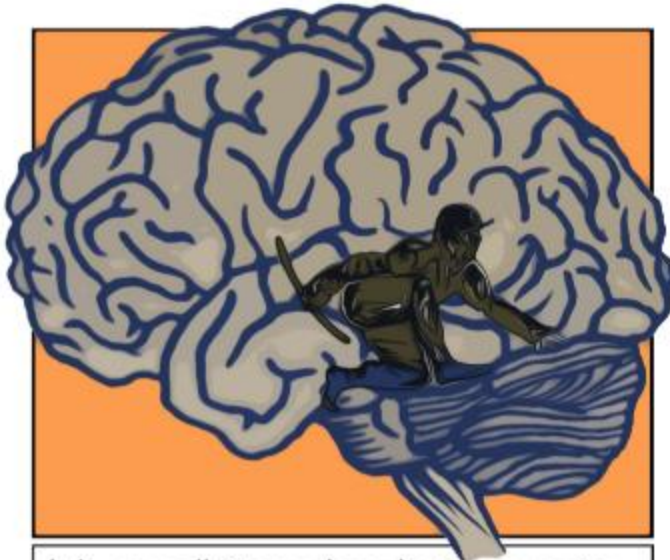


We can call it our alarm brain or warrior brain. It's scientific name is the amygdala





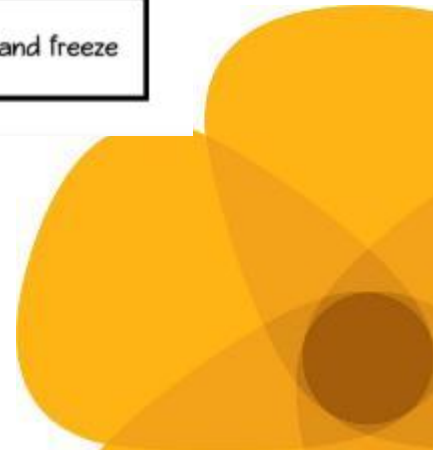
Making Sense



We can call it our alarm brain or warrior brain. It's scientific name is the amygdala



The amygdala is in charge of fight, flight and freeze



Making Sense



If it thinks you are in danger it sends chemical messages to your body to run, punch or 'play dead'



It is so keen to protect you, it doesn't stop to check if there is real danger or just a little fright, surprise or shock



It's a bit like how a smoke alarm doesn't know the difference between burnt toast and a real fire but it beeps anyway; 'just in case'

Why does it feel so yuck?



If you don't actually need to run away or fight a wild animal, your body is left with all the 'emergency chemicals' and these can make you feel really yuck!



You might feel puffed and breathless because you have been doing little fast breaths to get ready to run and your face might feel red and hot.



This kind of breathing can make you feel dizzy or a bit 'wobbly'



Why does it feel so yuck?



Your heart can be pounding and you might feel sick because your body thought it needed to run fast and so isn't working on the food in your tummy



The muscles in your legs and arms get ready to run or punch and so they feel tense and then maybe a bit weak and shaky.



You might feel sweaty as your body tries to cool itself down (because it thinks you need to run fast!).





How is it for you?

How does it feel?

Does it feel like..?

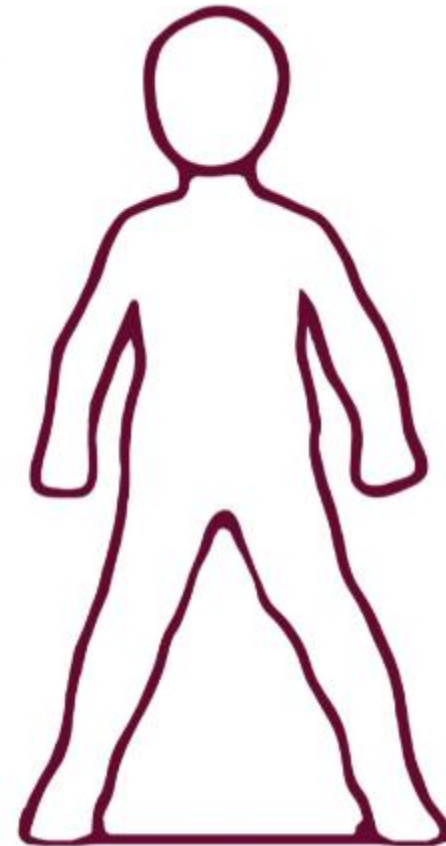
Where do you feel it?

Does it feel warm or cold?

Do you feel fast or slow?

I can see...

I wonder if...





Dipping your toe in...

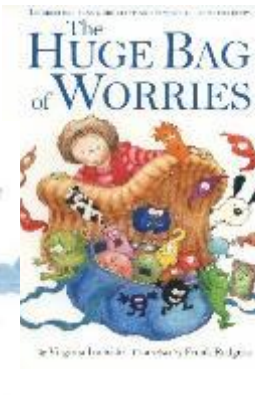
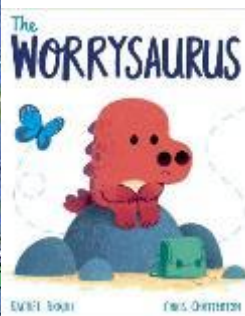
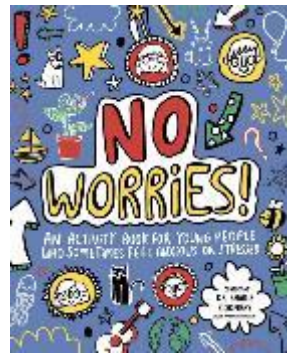
- If it was a colour, what would it be?
- If it was an animal, what would it be?
- If it was a shape, what would it be?
- Is it loud or quiet?
- Is it familiar or new?
- Is it large or small?



When they are calm... be curious about their negative belief

- On a scale of 0 – 10, how strong does that belief feel right now?
- Let's think of all the 'evidence' that the belief is true
- Let's think of all the 'evidence' that the belief is not always true
- What do you notice in your body as you think about this second list?
- Where are you on the scale now?

Some useful resources...

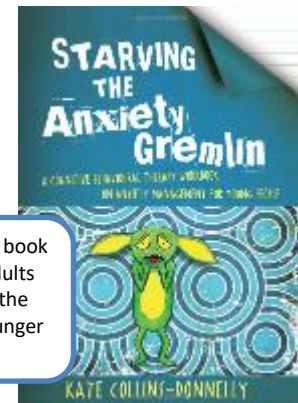


Explaining Anxiety to children

For mindful breathing and regulation



For older children (the book mentions 10+) but adults can use the ideas in the book and adapt to younger audiences



(Most of these can be found on YouTube being read as well)

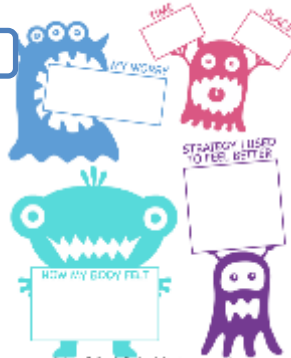
Other Things to Try...



Worry Monsters



MY WORRY MONSTER TRACKER



Worry Trackers and Diaries

Today I Feel...

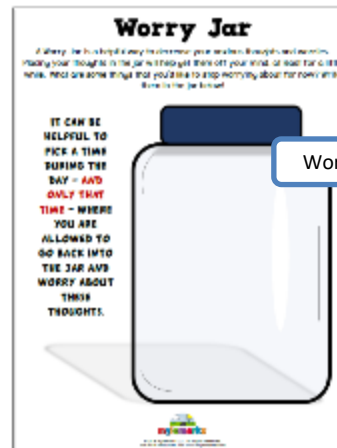
How do you feel? Tick the box that best describes how you are feeling.

😊 😞 😟 😧 😓 😞 😞

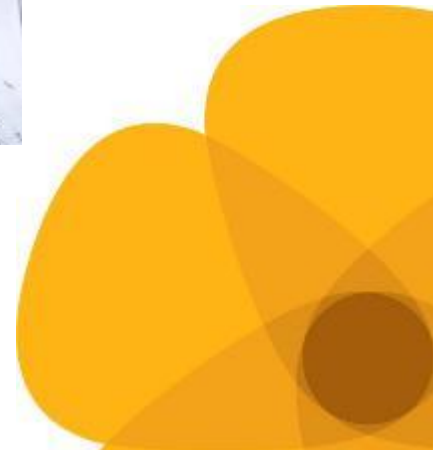
Happy Sad Scared Worried Tired Frustrated

Because...

Write or draw about what happened.

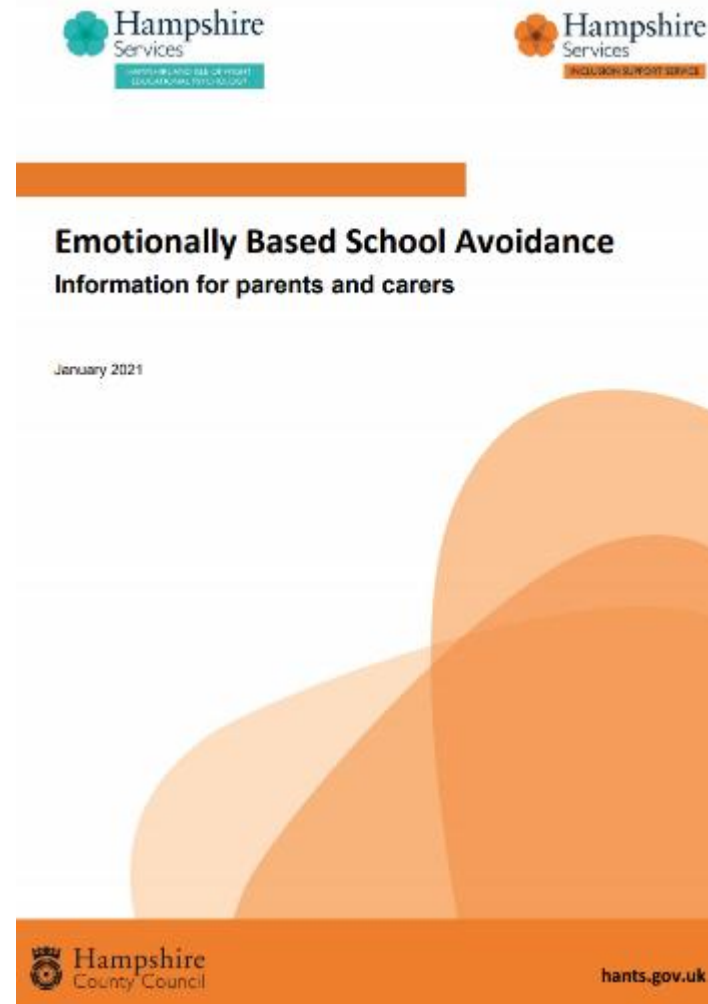
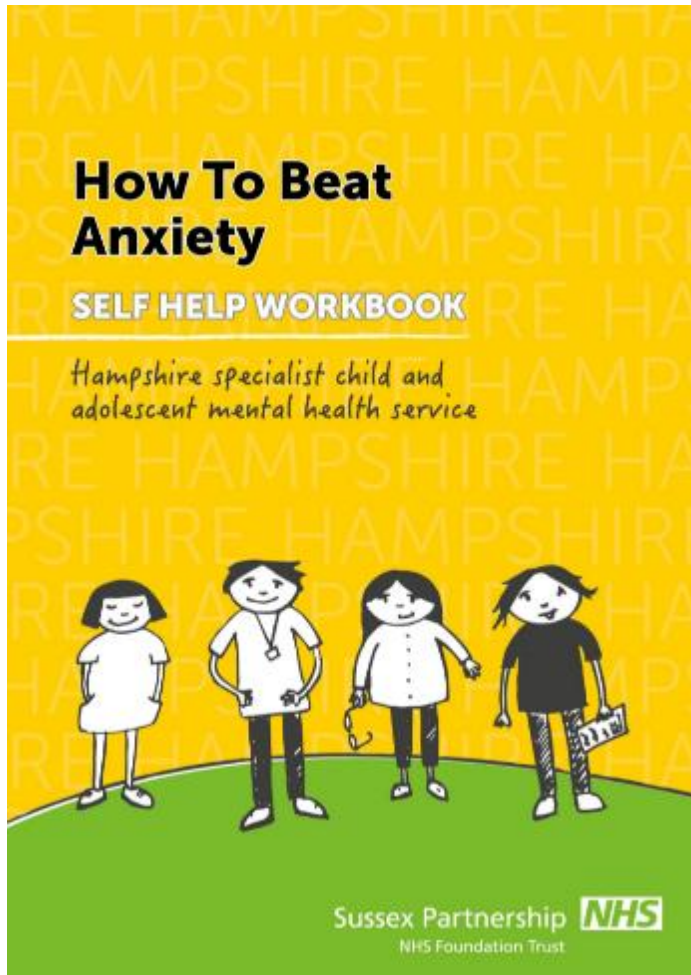


Worry Jars



<https://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/issue/anxiety-2/>

[EBSA-Parents-and-Carers-Information.pdf \(hants.gov.uk\)](https://hants.gov.uk/EBSA-Parents-and-Carers-Information.pdf)



Primary Behaviour Service Anxiety Parent Workshop - Hatch Warren Juniors

